

NEIGHBORS

A BOOK OF POEMS

By

WILFRED WILSON GIBSON

"A Millet in word-painting who writes with a terrible simplicity."—*The Outlook*.

"Wilfred Wilson Gibson has established his own manner, and that manner is the most distinctive of the English poetry of today."—*The Nation, London*.

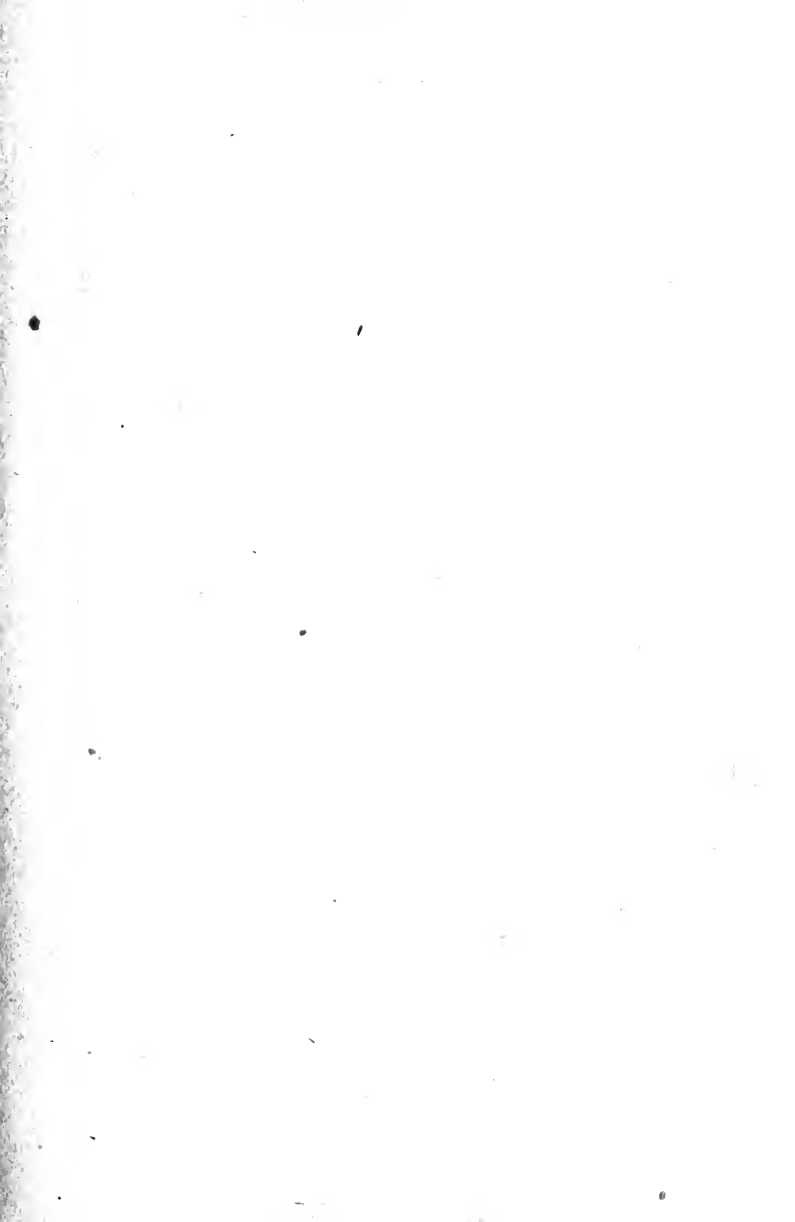
"The heart of humanity is in this poet's verse, but in his evocation of the social spirit he never neglects that artistic perfection through which he gains the interest and admiration of all who love art and life."

—*Boston Transcript*.

Neighbors, so called from its first group of poems describing English country characters, brings evidence of new power developing in Mr. Gibson. Here are war poems, which more than answer the prophecies made when *Battle* was published. A section named "Travels" pictures places with a beauty and thoughtfulness that stamp them unforgettably upon one. The final group, "Home," returns to England and to some of Mr. Gibson's interesting love songs, and includes a few longer poems from an early volume now long out of print.

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NEIGHBOURS

BY
WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

LIVELIHOOD

HILL TRACKS

WOMENKIND

DAILY BREAD

COLLECTED POEMS

BATTLE AND OTHER POEMS

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

NEIGHBOURS

BY

WILFRID WILSON GIBSON

New York

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1920

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**TO
MICHAEL**

Brief songs of these distracted days
I dedicate to you
In whose clear undistracted gaze
Old Eden blooms anew —

That, when beset by hopes and fears
Which life yet hides from you,
You'll think of me in after years
And find my singing true.



NEIGHBOURS

ROBERT AND ELEANOR ASKEW

What do you listen for?

I hardly know,
Unless my heart is hearkening for the flow
Of Tarras Water, singing by the door
Of Kirdlestead. I've never lived before
So far from running water in my life.
The quiet frightens me.

The quiet, wife?
You never heard the tramp of passing feet
Or rumble of wheels at Kirdlestead. This street
Is quiet enough; but surely Kirdlestead
Was quieter?

I've never lain in bed
Without the voice of water calling clear,
Save when the West wind drowned it, in my ear;
And now I cannot sleep: the darkness lies

NEIGHBOURS

Heavily as a deadweight on my eyes,
As though I lay deep-buried underground
With ears that strained to catch the faintest sound
Of wind in grass or water over stones :
The silence steals like ice into my bones
And numbs my body, freezing blood and breath
Till my heart flutters in the clutch of death.

And you can talk of death, a new-made bride,
Lying the first night by your husband's side?

The husband that my father pledged me to
With his last dying breath! The dead and you
Have held me to my troth : and I'm the wife
Of my dead father's faithful friend for life —
For life that now I know can never be
The song that Tarras Water sang to me.

CELIA AND SYLVIA WARDEN

What is that tapping? There it is again!

A spray of roses blown against the pane —
Thorns scratching and a softly-thudding bloom.

It's strange as we mope here in this prim room
Yawning for bedtime in the cold lamplight,
To think of roses blowing in the night,
And just that thin glass shutting them outside.
Oh, how I long to fling the windows wide!

Roses and thorns!

Ay, thorns, too, if need be!
Rather than hear them tap incessantly
The cold glass that shuts in my heart, I'd bare
My bosom for the sharpest thorns to tear.

JOHN AND MARGARET NETHERTON

Why do you strike a match?

I want to see

What time it is, wife.

It is nearly three.

How do you know that, wife, without a light?

I know.

You know? Well, sure enough, you're right.

I cannot think . . .

You don't remember, then?

Remember, wife?

The memories of men!

But, husband, as it seems you don't recall,
What makes you want to know the time at all?

I couldn't say, wife: but I cannot get

A wink of sleep — as if my eyes were set

On something that they cannot see quite clear:

NEIGHBOURS

My thoughts keep fumbling something very near
That yet eludes them always. And just now
I felt that, rest or no rest, anyhow,
I must know what o'clock it was. But you —
I cannot think, wife, how it was you knew
Almost the very moment . . .

'T was nigh three
A year ago that he smiled up at me;
And as within my arms he lay so still
I felt his body stiffen and grow chill
Against my bosom : and how should my breast
Forget the moment when his heart found rest?

OLIVER AND URSULA REED

It's useless, wife, to turn it up: the oil
Is done, and you'll just char the wick.

The toil

Lamps take to keep them going! It's not long
Since last I filled it. Surely something's wrong
With a lamp that burns so quickly.

Ay . . . the light

We thought would burn a lifetime, in one night
Consumed its fuel in a wild flare, and we
Are left a charred wick, smouldering smokily,
To work by till, at last, a dull red spark,
It shall wink out and leave us in the dark.

BARBARA FELL

Stephen, wake up! There's someone at the gate.

Quick, to the window. . . . Oh, you'll be too late!

I hear the front door opening quietly.

Did you forget last night to turn the key?

A foot is on the stairs — nay, just outside

The very room — the door is opening wide. . . .

Stephen, wake up! Wake up! Who's there?

Who's there?

I only feel a cold wind in my hair. . . .

Have I been dreaming, Stephen? Husband, wake

And comfort me: I think my heart will break.

I never knew you sleep so sound and still. . . .

O my heart's love, why is your hand so chill?

KATHERINE WEIR

Though I have been a none-too-happy wife,
And now my children grow away from me,
Bringing to old age fresh anxiety,
I have been used ; and to be used by life,
Even ill-used and broken utterly
With every faith betrayed and trust abused,
Is a kinder lot than in security
To crumble coldly to the grave, unused.

ESTHER MILBURN

Once realised, what else was left to do
But part and go our separate ways anew?
I've not set eyes upon him since that night.
Why did we marry? Why did that paper light
I held the match to? Yes, it's gone black out,
Leaving the sticks unkindled, and no doubt
The fire must be relaid before 't will burn.
But when love fails there is no second turn.
If once the paper doesn't fire the wood,
Or the blazing wood, the coal, there's little good
In striking matches to eternity:
They only spurt and flicker mockingly,
Scorching the fingers, to illuminate
Charred litter in the cold bars of the grate.

PHILIP AND PHOEBE WARE

Who is that woman, Philip, standing there
Before the mirror doing up her hair?

You're dreaming, Phoebe, or the morning light
Mixing and mingling with the dying night
Makes shapes out of the darkness, and you see
Some dream-remembered phantasy maybe.

Yet, it grows clearer with the growing day;
And in the cold dawnlight her hair is grey:
Her lifted arms are naught but bone: her hands
Are lean as claws, as, fumbling long, she stands
Trying to pin that wisp into its place.

O Philip, I must look upon her face
There in the mirror. Nay, but I will rise
And peep over her shoulder . . . Oh, the eyes
That burn out from that face of skin and bone
Searching my very marrow are my own!

ANDREW AND ANN HEATHER- INGTON

What are you thinking of so seriously?

My birthday, Ann.

 Your birthday? Mercy me,
I'd quite forgotten that it falls to-day!

What matter, wife? Birthdays as one grows grey
Are scarce the anniversaries of joy
They once were.

 I can't picture you, a boy.
Your hair's no greyer now than when we met
The first time, just a year ago: and yet
You did not think yourself too grey to wed
A girl just fresh from school.

 And her gold head
Seemingly didn't think itself too young
To marry grizzled locks?

 A golden tongue
Had more to do with it than silver hairs.

NEIGHBOURS

But you, you came upon me unawares
Before I'd realised what life might be,
Before I knew what it might mean to me.

Though you were old enough to be more wise. . . .

Yet not too old to be dazzled by your eyes!
My heart was young enough . . .

At fifty-nine!

Ay, and still loves to see your blue eyes shine
Even though anger fire them.

Then it's true
Years count for naught. I'm older far than you.
Your heart's a boy's heart still: but mine's as old
As any woman's heart whose tale is told.
Though you were forty years of age, a man
Halfway through life before my life began,
I have outstripped you in a single year,
And have naught left to hope for or to fear.

REBECCA NIXON AND MARTHA WAUGH

If your clock's going at all, it must be slow.
Surely, it's stopped?

It stopped a week ago.

A week ago — and you have let it stand?

I hadn't the heart to wind it up. No hand
But Ben's has turned the key since he, himself,
Put the clock there upon the mantelshelf
The day that we came home for the first time
To set up house together: and its chime
Had never failed to sound an hour since then,
Unless he had it down to clean; for Ben
Was handy and could always overhaul
A clock, though it was not his trade at all,
As well as any watchmaker. His heart
Doted on wheels: he'd handle every part
So daintily that you could never guess
His job was hewing coal. I must confess
Wheels always daunted me: but Ben's brain went
By clockwork; and his happiest hours were spent

NEIGHBOURS

Sorting old clocks and trying to make them go.
And that one's never been a second slow
In all these years or half-a-second fast,
Or failed to strike . . . until Ben breathed his last
On Monday morn before the stroke of three . . .
Though all the town's clocks hammered presently
As if they struck my heart . . . Ben always wound
That clock each Sunday; but when the last came
round

He'd been in bed a week, and his poor mind
Was wandering — though his fingers tried to wind
Some ghostly clock that troubled him all night —
And when I stole downstairs and struck a light,
I missed the tick; and with a still white face
Ben's clock was standing silent in its place
With motionless hands just on the stroke of three.
Its heart had stopped when Ben's stopped. As
for me

I'll never wind it up again: I know
Even if I cared, no touch could make it go
But Ben's: and those still hands will always keep
My heart in mind . . .

Nay, Martha, you need sleep.
You mustn't brood like this. Try to forget.
Come, let me wind it up for you and set
The old clock going. Only think how Ben
Would hate to have it standing.

NEIGHBOURS

Wind it then.

Ben hated a stopped clock : and now he's gone,
It seems I've got to keep things going on.

WILLIAM AND AGNES PRINGLE

You've locked the doors and snecked the windows
tight?

I've locked up as I've locked up every night
Since father crept that last time painfully
Upstairs and left the locking-up to me —
Since for the last time father went to bed
To rise no more. To think that he's been dead
Just twenty years — ay, to the very hour!
The clock was striking in the Abbey tower
When he sat up. "Are all the windows fast?"
He whispered, then dropped back and breathed his
last.
To think I'd nigh forgotten!

Ay, to-day,
Your thoughts have all been turned a different way.

True, lass: and yet it's queer I should forget.

Queer, that a bridegroom's thoughts should not
be set
On death?

NEIGHBOURS

Nay, queer I didn't choose instead
A different day in all the year to wed.

Ay — but you've not forgotten to secure
The doors and windows: so you may feel sure
While such important things you think of still
Your mind's not getting over-flighty, Will.
But you must never let a harebrained wife
Divert you from the habits of a life.
Yet, here's just one thing, Will, that puzzles me:
What is it you lock out so carefully —
That you've locked out each night these twenty years,
And your old father with his anxious fears
Locked out before you, and his father, too,
As likely as not, before him? Why should you
Secure yourself against the harmless night?

I never looked upon it in that light —
But it's the custom . . .

What is it that you dread
Will come upon you as you lie in bed,
If you should leave a window or a door
Unfastened? .

Well, I hardly know, I'm sure!

NEIGHBOURS

No bolt or bar has ever locked out death :
So your old father might have spared his breath.
Or is it, rather, something you lock in
Each night, lest thieves . . .

There's naught for thieves to win;
Though I had left the doors and windows wide
These many years . . .

But then, you'd no young bride.
And now, I wonder if you know aright
Or realise what you lock in to-night?

NICHOLAS HALL

Well, who are you? And how did you come there?
I must have nodded, drowsing in my chair,
Although I could have sworn I hadn't slept
Or even winked an eyelid, but had kept
My eyes set steadily upon the glow,
Dreaming of fires burnt out so long ago —
Ay, long ago! But you, when did you come?
Why do you stand there, smiling, keeping mum?
I felt no draught blow from the opening door,
And heard no footstep on the sanded floor.
Why don't you speak, young man? — for you are
 young —
That much I see — and surely you've a tongue?
And young men should be civil to old men.
What, you won't answer? Please to leave me, then,
To my own hearthside: please to go away.
You'll be an old man, too, yourself, some day;
And you'll be sorry then, you will, my son,
To think you stood there grinning, making fun
Of an old man's afflictions, an old man
Who once was young, too, when the quick blood
 ran . . .
But who you are, I can't make out at all.

NEIGHBOURS

Why do you cast no shadow on the wall
While the high chair you lean against throws back
A shadow on the whitewash sharp and black?
There's something half-familiar, now the flame
Lights up your face — something that when you
came

Was passing through my mind . . . I can't re-
call . . .

Ah God, what's happening to Nicholas Hall
When he can see his young self standing there
Mocking his old self huddled in a chair!

BLIND BELL

Like a wind-writhen ash
On a rime-grizzled moor,
Corpse-cold in the shade
Beside the church-door,

She stood with a grin
As we trod, newly-wed,
The slimy green path
By the mounds of the dead.

As her blank eyes bleared out
From the pocked yellow face
Like a moon on the wane,
We slackened our pace.

As her cruel blind eyes
Peered into each heart,
We faltered and trailed
Unlinked and apart

Till estranged and corpse-cold
We stood at our door,
Each lone as an ash
On a rime-grizzled moor.

ELLEN CHESTER

After working all day at the tanpits,
With strong hands tanned horny and hard
And stained by the bark brown as leather
He would come every night from the yard.

And I from my work at the laundry,
With hands soused in suds clean and white
And soft to the touch as old linen
Would meet him halfway every night :

I'd meet him halfway every evening,
Though always I shuddered to feel
Those hard fingers gripping my fingers
And crushing my soft hands like steel.

But now I'm forgot and forsaken;
And eagerly waiting he stands
For a girl coming home from the gardens
With weathered and grubby red hands.

As unseen in the dark of a doorway
I watch him alone and apart,
My cold fingers fumble my bosom
To loosen his clutch from my heart.

RICHARD KENDAL

I could not sleep for aching cold;
And as I turned and tossed
I muttered: This sharp snap will mean
Money and labour lost:
My currant-bushes, newly-bought,
Will all be killed by frost.

The bushes I've saved up to buy,
And with back-breaking toil
Have set with roots spread carefully
In the well-watered soil
Are just an acre of innocents
For early frost to spoil.

Though every bush survived the cold
To pay me royally,
The breaking of the morrow's morn
Brought bitter news to me;
For in the night my oldest friend
Had perished, drowned at sea.

In drowning darkness, icy-chill,
My oldest friend was lost;

NEIGHBOURS

Yet never once I'd thought of him
As fretfully I tost,
Concerned lest my new currant-trees
Should suffer from the frost.

BETTY RIDDLE

As she sits at her stall in the Martinmas Fair
With a patched blue umbrella slung over her chair,
Old Betty Riddle sells
Greenjacks and jargonels,
Fixing some ghost of old days with her stare.

“ A ha’p’orth of greenjacks ! ” each little boy cries,
Devouring six-pen’orth at least with his eyes :
Into his grubby hands
Pears drop as still he stands ;
But she gives him no glance as he munches his prize.

While mumbling and mowing she broods all the day,
And her mellow green pyramids dwindle away,
Folk in the roundabout
Racket and skirl and shout ;
Yet never a word to it all does she say.

And even if, when her whole stock-in-trade’s bought,
Some laughing lad’s eye by that cold stare is caught,
Glumly away he’ll slink
Too dull of wit to think
Of offering a penny to her for her thought.

NEIGHBOURS

And soon they forget her, the lads without sense ;
Yet the thought that is burning that blue and intense
Past-piercing steely eye,
Blind to the passer-by,
Must be worth a deal more than the pears and the
pence.

Still staring she sits as the slow quarters chime
Till the raw fog has covered her bare boards with
rime —
Crazy old wife who sells
Greenjacks and jargonels —
Having buried three husbands in all in her time.

BESSIE STOKOE

He stood with the other young herds
At the Hiring to-day:
And I laughed and I chaffed and changed words
With every young hind of them all
As I stopped by the lollipop stall,
But never a word would he say.

He had straggly long straw-coloured hair
And a beard like a goat —
In his breeches a badly-stitched tear
That I longed, standing there in the crush,
To re-mend, as I hankered to brush
The ruddle and fluff from his coat.

But his bonnie blue eyes staring wide
Looked far beyond me,
As though on some distant fellside
His dogs were collecting the sheep,
And he anxiously watched them to keep
A young dog from running too free —

And I almost expected to hear
From the lips of the lad

NEIGHBOURS

A shrill whistle sing in my ear
As he eyed the green hillside to check
The fussy black frolicking speck
That was chasing the grey specks like mad . . .

So I left them, and went on my way
With a lad with black hair;
And we swung and rode round all the day
To the racket of corncrake and gong:
But I never forgot in the throng
The eyes with the far-away stare.

The jimmy-smart groom at my side
Had twinkling black eyes;
But the grin on his mouth was too wide,
And his hands with my hands were too free:
So I took care to slip him at tea
As he turned round to pay for the pies,

And I left him alone on the seat
With the teapot and cups
And the two pies he'd paid for to eat.
If he happens to guess at the cause,
It may teach him to keep his red paws
For the handling of horses and pups.

But alone in the rain and the dark
As I made for the farm

NEIGHBOURS

I halted a moment to hark
To the sound of a shepherd's long stride :
And the shy lad stepped up to my side,
And I felt his arm link through my arm.

So it seems after all I'm to mend
Those breeches, and keep
That shaggy head clipped to the end,
And the shaggy chin clean, and to give
That coat a good brush — and to live
All my days in the odour of sheep.

AGATHA TODD

Young lads tramping, fifes and drums —
Down the street the hubbub comes :

And the drumsticks drub again
On my stretched and aching brain ;

While the screeching of the fife
Just goes through me like a knife.

Yet I thought the music gay
When Dick Lishman marched away ;

And I laughed ; for what was he
But a lad who bothered me —

But a man of many men
I had little need of then ?

Now I know that if the fife
Cut my heart-strings like a knife,

Rattling drumsticks, rub-a-dub,
On my coffin-lid would drub ;

NEIGHBOURS

And my heart would never rest
In the hollow of my breast,

But would always start and beat
To the tramping of dead feet.

RALPH LILBURN

The night we took the bees out to the heather,
The sealed hives stacked behind us, as together
We rode in the jingly jolting cart, were humming
Like the far-murmuring rumour of blown branches.

White in the moonflame was the flowering heather
And white the sandy trackway, as together
We travelled, and a dewy scent of honey
Hung in the warm white windless air of midnight.

A silvery trackway through moon-silvered heather
To the humming dark of the hives we'll ride together
For evermore through the murmurous dewy mid-
night,
My heart, a hive of honey-scented moonlight.

OLIVER GARTH

Cold as mushrooms are her hands,
Cold and white,
As she awaits me in the night
Where St. Michael's steeple stands.

Cold as mushrooms are her lips
In the dew
Kissing mine beneath the yew
As within my arm she slips.

And I learn naught from her cold
Lightless eyes
Of her daydreams as she lies
Underneath the heavy mould.

Once her hands were brown as mine
When we stood
In the little rowan-wood
By the waters of the Tyne,

And her parted lips were bright
And as red
As the berries overhead
In the still October light.

NEIGHBOURS

And I promised I'd be true
To her there . . .

And the rowan-trees are bare . . .

And we meet beneath the yew.

HENRY TURNBULL

He planked down sixpence, and he took his drink,
Then slowly picked the change up from the zinc,
And in his breeches' pocket buttoned tight
Two greasy coppers which that very night
Were used by Betty Catchiside, called in
To lay him out, when she'd tied up his chin,
To keep his eyelids shut: and so he lies
With twopence change till doomsday on his eyes.

SAM HOGARTH

He sits — his Bible open on his knee,
Nell, his old whippet, curled up at his feet —
Muttering at whiles and nodding drowsily
Over the damped slack-fire that dully burns
In the little grate: then shifting in his seat
He lifts the book with shaky hands, his head
Wagging with eagerness, and fumbling turns
From the tenth chapter of Genesis, unread,
To the well-thumbed flyleaf at the back, to pore
With spectacled weak reverent eyes once more,
Lest it escape his failing memory,
On Nell's proud scrawl-recorded pedigree.

JAUNTY JACK

He'd run like a cat on the ridge of the roof,
And then to give proof
Of his daredevil wit he would stumble and slip
Down the slant of the slates and over the side —
While agape we would fear for the end of his
slide —

But just as he seemed to shoot over the edge
His fingers would grip
The lip of the gutter or maybe the ledge
Of a top-storey window; and so he'd hang there
Cockadoodling and kicking his heels in the air.

And then he'd swing on to the ladder and pant
Up the slippery slant,
And take up his trowel and hawk of wet lime,
Going quietly on with the job he was at
With the same solemn face and sly rake of the hat
As though he had worked without stopping to wink
The whole of the time,
So sober and smug that a newcomer'd think
That never a notion at all he had got
That wasn't concerned with the new chimney-pot.

NEIGHBOURS

And no one could guess he was wedded for life
To a slut of a wife,
And had five gaping lasses and five gaping boys
To feed and to clothe and to keep in shoeleather,
And to scrub every Saturday night all together
At the scullery tap with a splash-dash and squall
And the hell of a noise.
Then one dark Winter morning his pride had a
 fall —
Tripped over his shadow and headlong downstairs,
And ended his jests and his lardy-da airs.

MICHAEL DODD

When the folding-star had kindled
In the embers of the West,
And the happy day was over,
Quietly we sank to rest

Thinking we should sleep till daybreak ;
But we wakened all too soon
As above the ridge of Hareshaw
Stole the cold white witches' moon —

Stole the icy moon and held us
Tranced as we with numb surprise
Saw the cold estranging glitter
Of each other's alien eyes.

MARTHA CAFFREY

It must have been his name that stirred
My mind from slumber none too deep,
As, waking in the night I heard
My sister talking in her sleep.

I could not catch what else she said
As I lay there with heart aflame,
Thinking about the newly-dead,
Wondering why she should breathe his name —

Why she should dream of him who lay
Scarce colder in the grave than he,
Since our unlucky wedding-day,
Had ever shown himself to me.

MARGARET DEAN

When we broke in the lamp was burning still
With clear and steady light
Although the noonday blazed on heath and hill,
But in her eyes was night.

Their flame that had out-braved the stress and care
Of hope and fear and doubt
In the long quiet of the last despair
Had gently flickered out.

PHOEBE ELLIS

The little bell still sounds as true and clear
As when she rang it, standing at the door ;
And still the happy children when they hear
Run in from play, though she will ring no more.

But whether they remember, as they storm
The threshold, who once rang it, none can tell,
Or if for them each night her ghostly form
From some dim threshold tinkles a ghostly bell.

ELLEN CHANDLER

As drowsily she lay in bed
And watched the sunlight dance and quiver
On the slant ceiling overhead,
And hearkened to the singing river,
She wondered who last watched the light
From off the singing water glancing
On the low ceiling's curded white
In golden rings and eddies dancing,

And even as she wondered, heard
A voice between a sigh and shiver,
Though nothing in the chamber stirred:
"Where comes no sound of singing river
I lie, who lay where you lie now,
Daughter, and watched that golden glancing —
Cold darkness heavy on my brow,
And done, the dazzle and the dancing!"

JANE BATHGATE

She never even stops to think
What she is doing here —
But scrubs potatoes at the sink
Or fetches William's beer,

Or baths their six young bairns, and mends
Their clothes with weary eyes —
Throughout a day that hardly ends
Before it's time to rise :

And she'll be much too tired to heed
In the grave's secure retreat,
When there's no longer any need
Of making both ends meet.

ANTHONY EARNSHAW

We found him sleeping in the drifted snow
Beside his buried but still breathing ewes.
'Tis rarely granted any man, to know
And find, unsought, the death that he would choose;
Yet he who'd always laboured among sheep
Since he could walk, and who had often said
That death should find him working, stumbled dead
Succouring his flocks, and by them fell asleep.

Spare sinewy body with brown knotted hands
Lean weathered face and eyes that burned so clear
From gazing ever through the winds that blow
Over wide grassy spaces, one who stands
Beside you, quiet on your hurdle-bier,
Envies your hard-earned death amid the snow.



CHAMBERS



CHAMBERS

The labyrinthine corridors of my mind
Between dead, lightless, many-chambered walls
In endless mazes of confusion wind:
And only now and again the live ray falls,
Touching the secret spring of some hid door
With magic, flinging open some unknown
Chamber of light wherein there dwells alone
Beauty or terror never glimpsed before.

Could but that ray through all the chambers glow
Once and for ever till my mind should burn
One sunlike sphere of still celestial light!
But only rarely, opening out of turn,
Two neighbouring doors spring wide at once and
show
Beauty and terror together in the night.

DRIFTWOOD

Black spars of driftwood burn to peacock flames,
Sea-emeralds and sea-purples and sea-blues,
And all the innumerable ever-changing hues
That haunt the changeless deeps but have no names,
Flicker and spire in our enchanted sight :
And as we gaze, the unsearchable mystery,
The unfathomed cold salt magic of the sea,
Shines clear before us in the quiet night.

We know the secret that Ulysses sought,
That moonstruck mariners since time began
Snatched at a drowning hazard — strangely brought
To our homekeeping hearts in drifting spars
We chanced to kindle under the cold stars —
The secret of the ocean-heart of man.

THE PAISLEY SHAWL

What were his dreams who wove this coloured
shawl —

The grey, hard-bitten weaver, gaunt and dour,
Out of whose grizzled memory, even as a flower
Out of bleak Winter at young April's call
In the old tradition of flowers breaks into bloom,
Blossomed the ancient intricate design
Of softly-glowing hues and exquisite line —
What were his dreams, crouched at his cottage loom?

What were her dreams, the laughing April lass
Who first, in the flowering of young delight,
With parted lips and eager tilted head
And shining eyes, about her shoulders white
Drew the soft fabric of kindling green and red,
Standing before the candle-lighted glass?

1916

The reek of boiling catch: against the sky
Wet dripping amber of the new-dipped sails
Hung on the crag-top in the sun to dry
Flapping against the tarry glistening rails
In a wind that brings a tang of burning kelp:
A sleek black cormorant on a scar rose-red
Washed by unfoaming emerald, and the yelp
Of gulls that wheel unwavering overhead —

Clear colours, searching odours and keen cries
Sting all my eager senses to fresh life
With tingling ears and nostrils and smarting eyes:
Yet even now in sick unending strife
In a wide slimy welter oversea
Men spill each other's blood indifferently.

TROOPSHIP: MID-ATLANTIC **(S. S. BALTIC: July 1917)**

Dark waters into crystalline brilliance break
About the keel, as through the moonless night
The dark ship moves in its own moving lake
Of phosphorescent cold moon-coloured light;
And to the clear horizon all around
Drift pools of fiery beryl flashing bright
As though unquenchably burning, cold and white,
A million moons in the night of waters drowned.

And staring at the magic with eyes adream
That never till now have looked upon the sea,
Boys from the Middle-West lounge listlessly
In the unlanterned darkness, boys who go
Beckoned by some unchallengeable gleam
To unknown lands to fight an unknown foe.

HANDS

Tempest without: within, the mellow glow
Of mingling lamp and firelight over all —
Etchings and watercolours on the wall,
Cushions and curtains of clear indigo,
Rugs, damask-red and blue as Tyrian seas,
Deep chairs, black oaken settles, hammered brass,
Translucent porcelain and sea-green glass —
Colour and warmth and light and dreamy ease:

And I sit wondering where are now the hands
That wrought at anvil, easel, wheel and loom —
Hands, slender, swart, red, gnarled — in foreign
lands
Or English shops to furnish this seemly room:
And all the while, without, the windy rain
Drums like dead fingers tapping at the pane.

LINDISFARNE

Jet-black the crags of False Emmanuel Head
Against the Winter sunset : standing stark
Within the shorn sun's frosty glare, night-dark,
A solitary monk with arms outspread
In worship or in frustrate tense desire
Of racked and tortured flesh : still young and spare,
With drooping head he seems to hang in air
Crucified on a wheel of blood-red fire.

The red sun dips : and slowly to his side
His slack arms fall ; and in the clear green light
Of the frosty afterglow where coldly burns
A lonely star, a very pillar of night
He stands above the steely shivering tide,
Then slowly to the darkening East he turns.

DUNSTANBOROUGH

Over the unseen September tide the mist
Sweeps ever inland, winding in a shroud
Stark walls and toppling towers that in a cloud
Of streaming vapour soar and twirl and twist,
Unbuilt and rebuilt in grey smoke,
Until the drifting shadowy bastions seem
The old phantasmal castle wherein man's dream
Seeks shelter from time's still-pursuing stroke.

And I remember how, above a sea
That under cold winds shivered steely-clear,
Fresh from the chisel clean-cut and white and hard,
These towers, rock-founded for eternity,
Glittered when Lancelot and Guenevere
One April morning came to Joyous Gard.

LIFE

On the cliff's edge a dewy cluster of thrift
Sparkles like amethysts against the sea,
A sea of sapphire laced unceasingly
By little lines of foam and wings that drift
And wheel and dip in mazy dazzling flight
Bewilderingly before my dreaming eyes
That watch the snow and sapphire sink and rise,
Drowsed by the interweaving blue and white.

Yet in my chambered mind the while I see
Within an attic in a swarming high
And cliff-like tenement that blocks the sky,
One knitting and one stitching at a hem,
Two patient women uncomplainingly
Talking of all that life has done to them.

THE PUFFIN

He stooped down suddenly and thrust his hand
Into a tunnel in the shallow sand
Beneath a campion-clump, and brought to light
A brooding puffin with black wings clasped tight
To her white breast : but twisting round her sleek,
Pied, darting head, her scarlet razor-beak
She snapped in anger, cutting his finger clean
To the very bone ; and on the clump of green
Among the campion blossoms white as foam
He dropped the bird and watched her scurry home ;
And laughed, while from the wounded finger dripped
Blood redder even than the beak that ripped
The flesh so cruelly, and, chuckling, said :
“ Well, anyway, the blood still runs as red
In my old veins as when I saw it spill
The first time that I felt a puffin’s bill
Long years since : and it seems as though I had
As little sense as when I was a lad
To let myself be caught so easily
And that brave bird make such a fool of me
Who thought myself as wise as Solomon.
Yet it is better to feel a fool’s blood run
Still quick and lively in the veins and be

NEIGHBOURS

A living fool beside the April sea
Than lie like Solomon in his unknown grave,
A pinch of dry dust that no wit could save."

THE LETTER

Why was I moved to write
To him the very night
That he, unknown to me,
Upon his deathbed lay
With eyes that should not see
Another break of day —

Eyes that should never read
The long light-hearted screed
That rippled from my pen?
Why should I write to him
Whose sight was even then
With the last darkness dim?

For I had never heard
From him a single word
For years, or even thought
If he were ill or well:
And when I wrote I'd naught
That mattered much to tell.

Did the same memory
That moment moving me

NEIGHBOURS

To take my pen and write
Light-hearted as a boy
Move him on that last night
To think of me with joy?

Did his lost youth return
In one clear thought and burn
His being with the glow
Of old enraptured hours
When plunging through deep snow
We faced the raking showers?

Did death to him seem just
A wilder frolic gust
That caught his breath, and deep
In dazzling drowsy white
Of downy drifts did sleep
Steal over him that night?

But time will never tell
Whether some fateful spell
Or only idle whim
Moved me to write a screed
Of chaffing words to him
That he would never read.

BY THE WEIR

A scent of Esparto grass — and again I recall
That hour we spent by the weir of the paper-mill
Watching together the curving thunderous fall
Of frothing amber, bemused by the roar until
My mind was as blank as the speckless sheets that
wound

On the hot steel ironing-rollers perpetually turning
In the humming dark rooms of the mill: all sense
and discerning

By the stunning and dazzling oblivion of hill-waters
drowned.

And my heart was empty of memory and hope and
desire

Till, rousing, I looked afresh on your face as you
gazed —

Behind you an old gnarled fruit-tree in one still fire
Of innumerable flame in the sun of October blazed,
Scarlet and gold that the first white frost would spill
With eddying flicker and patter of dead leaves fall-
ing —

I looked on your face, as an exile from Eden re-
calling

NEIGHBOURS

A vision of Eve as she dallied bewildered and still
By the serpent-encircled tree of knowledge that
 flamed

With gold and scarlet of good and evil, her eyes
Rapt on the river of life: then bright and untamed
By the labour and sorrow and fear of a world that
 dies

Your ignorant eyes looked up into mine and I knew
That never our hearts should be one till your young
 lips had tasted

The core of the bitter-sweet fruit, and wise and toil-
 wasted,

You should stand at my shoulder an outcast from
 Eden, too.

THE PARROTS

Somewhere, somewhen I've seen,
But where or when I'll never know
Three parrots of shrill green
With crests of shriller scarlet flying
Out of black cedars as the sun was dying
Against cold peaks of snow.

From what forgotten life
Of other worlds I cannot tell
Flashes that screeching strife:
Yet the shrill colour and the strident crying
Sing through my blood and set my heart replying
And jangling like a bell.

THE WILLOWS

In the round hollow of the moonlit meadow
Over the pond the seven willows shiver,
And in the ghostly misty shine their branches
Rustle and glance and quiver —

Rustle and glance and quiver in the moonshine —
The seven sisters shaking sea-green tresses
Over the round pond's misty mirror, whispering
Strange secrets to the shadow in the cresses.

RETURN

Rust-red the bracken in the rain
Against the wet grey boulder —
Slowly the cold mist sweeps again
Over the mountain shoulder
And the wind blows colder.

Since last I saw the wind and rain
Sweep down the mountain shoulder
Some joy that will not come again
Has left a heart grown older,
And the wind blows colder.

APRIL

Over the rain-wet bells
Of scilla and daffodil
With April in their voices
The blackbirds pipe and trill:

And lucent yellow and blue
In clear notes bubble and throng
As daffodil and scilla
Sing in the blackbirds' song.

WORLDS

Through the pale green forest of tall bracken-stalks
Whose interwoven fronds, a jade-green sky,
Above me glimmer, infinitely high,
Towards my giant hand a beetle walks
In glistening emerald mail; and as I lie
Watching his progress through huge grassy blades
And over pebble-boulders, my own world fades
And shrinks to the vision of a beetle's eye.

Within that forest world of twilight green
Ambushed with unknown perils, one endless day
I travel down the beetle-trail between
Huge glossy boles through green infinity . . .
Till flashes a glimpse of blue sea through the
 bracken asway,
And my world is again a tumult of windy sea.

THE RIDGE

Here on the ridge where the shrill north-easter trails
Low clouds along the snow,
And in a streaming, moonlit vapour veils
The peopled earth below,

Let me, O Life, a little while forget
The horror of past years —
Man and his agony and bloody sweat,
The terror and the tears,

And struggle only in the mist and snow
Against the hateless wind,
Till, scourged and shriven, I again may go
To dwell among my kind.

RUGBY: 1917

I

All day the droning of the aeroplanes
Above the hot brick buildings in the blaze,
That in their skiey gliding seemed to graze
The air to fiercer fire above gilt vanes,
Sleek purple roofs, sharp-pricking spires, and towers
Of glowing mottled brick; and through my head
That droning hums and purrs, as aching red
And staring blue trail by the unending hours.

But under silvery olive-trees he sleeps
Tombd in a hill of marble on the Isle
Of Skyros that once, veiled in shimmering rain,
I saw in passing. On the rosy steeps
And silvery trees he looked a little while;
Then turned to slumber, never to wake again.

RUGBY: 1917

II

He slumbers: but his living words sing on,
Lighting for ever the dark hearts of men,
The hearts of men on whom his presence shone
Living, who'll never see his like again
In this world, and strange hearts that caught no
gleam

Of the golden spirit until his radiant death
Blazoned it over all the earth, a breath
Of singing fire from sunset seas of dream.

O singing fire, O starry words that sang
A moment through his lighted blood, and live
When he who gave you loving life is dead,
For ever to that fallen golden head
And the laughing golden heart from which you
sprang
Starry and singing and deathless life you give.

BLOOM

Laburnum, lilac, honeysuckle, broom,
Syringa, rowan, hawthorn, guelder-rose,
Azalea, rose and elder — Summer glows
About me in sultry smother of scent and bloom
Shut in between the old walls' mossy brick :
Yet as in the green and golden gloom I dream
In the drowsy dazzle of perfume and colour astream
An upland odour stings me to the quick —
The shrewd remembered smell, sharp clean and cold,
Of peat and moss where never blossoms blow
Under the shadow of bleak whinstone scars
The summer long, or only rarely show
Over black pools the sundew's stars of gold
Or grass of Parnassus' cold white scentless stars.

VICTIMS

Above me on the ridge an old grey ram
With ragged fleece, black muzzle and yellow eye,
Tangled in briars, against the lurid sky,
Seems even now to await the Abraham
Who shall release and slay him — patiently
On this high altar of bleak snow and ice
With head bowed ready for the sacrifice
To await the whetted blade of destiny.

He awaits unwondering, foreboding naught,
With blank, cold, shallow eye and easy breath,
Nor knows himself the destined victim caught,
Nor dreads the slicing sacrificial knife —
While Abraham, ever in the shadow of death,
Trembles to look upon the angel of life.

ISHMAEL

He came at last to a cadaverous land
Beneath a breathless livid sky supine
And limping over the burnt stone and sand
Reached a sleek lake of glazed unrippling brine,
And standing ankle-deep in brittle salt
That crusted the flat marge with prickling white,
Lifted his eyes to the grey sunless vault,
And waited for the coming on of night.

But never night with black oblivious balm
Or the healing lucency of starlight stole
Across that arid sky of aching grey.
Undying, by the dead lake's stagnant calm,
Caged in uncrumbling bones, for ever his soul
Stares at the blind face of unending day.

THE DANCER

Sheathed in scales of silver sequins
In a blue pool of limelight dancing
She twists and twirls and smiles and beckons
With dark eyes glancing —

She beckons to me in my skiey seat
With smiling teeth and dark eyes glancing:
But I only see as I watch her dancing.
The shadows that seek to tangle her feet.

SONG

Over the heather the trill of a falling stream
Sings in my ears like the silver voice of the light,
The light that falls from the stars in a silver stream
Into the pool of night —

Into the quiet pool of the night of dream
Where life that's a singing of joyful or sorrowful
 breath
Sinks in the icy deep of the starless dream
Of joyless and sorrowless death.

INSPIRATION

On the uttermost farflung ridge of ice and snow
That over pits of sunset fire hangs sheer
My naked spirit poises, then leaps clear
From the cold crystal into the furnace-glow
Of ruby and amber lucencies, and dives
For the brief moment of ten thousand lives
Through fathomless infinities of light,
Then cleansed by lustral flame and frost returns;
And for an instant through my body burns
The immortal fire of cold white ecstasy,
As down the darkening valley of the night
I keep the old track of mortality.

BRIC-A-BRAC

Into the room the level sunrays stream,
Shooting from under a low rainy cloud
Through shivering branches of a poplar bowed
In the wind of sunset; and in golden dream
The dull day ends; and the walls of creamy white
Quiver with rippling gold that fills the glass
Of a green amphora with wine-golden light,
And burnishes old Benares brass.

And suddenly in the quickening glory of gold
Buddha, who long has brooded in the gloom
Overshadowed by a curved Askari knife,
Wrapped in his rope of reverie manifold
Glowing young and fair, the very lord of life
Until his presence fills the little room.

FIRE

I

Across the Cleveland countryside the train
Panted and jolted through the lurid night
Of monstrous slag-heaps in the leaping light
Of belching furnaces: the driving rain
Lacing the glass with gold in that red glare
That momentarily revealed the cinderous land
Of blasted fields that stretched on either hand
With livid waters gleaming here and there.

By hovels of men who labour till they die
With iron and the fire that never sleeps
We plunged in pitchy night among huge heaps:
Then once again that red glare lit the sky,
And, high above the highest hill of slag,
I saw Prometheus hanging from his crag.

FIRE

II

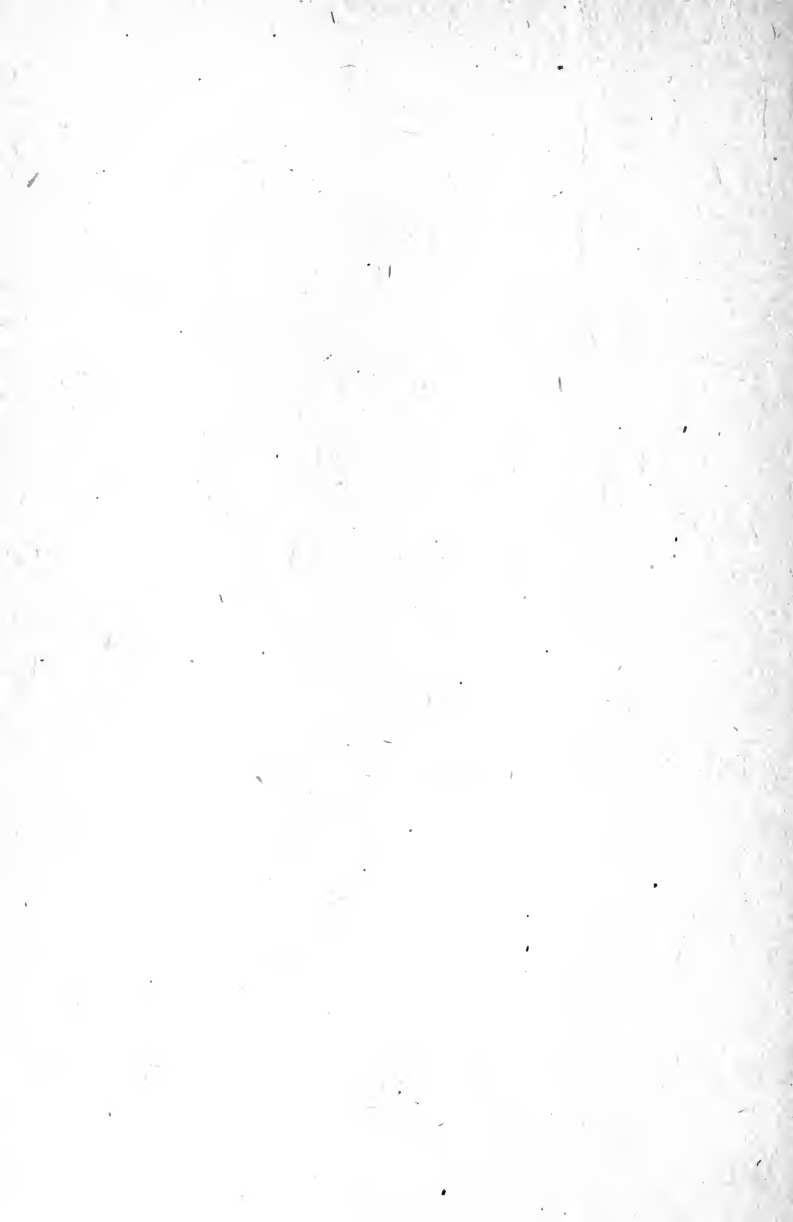
In each black tile a mimic fire's aglow,
And in the hearthlight old mahogany,
Ripe with stored sunshine that in Mexico
Poured like gold wine into the living tree
Summer on summer through a century,
Burns like a crater in the heart of night:
And all familiar things in the ingle-light
Glow with a secret strange intensity.

And I remember hidden fires that burst
Suddenly from the midnight while men slept,
Long-smouldering rages in the darkness nursed
That to an instant ravening fury leapt,
And the old terror menacing evermore
A crumbling world with fiery molten core.

ELEGY

Stars that fall through crystal skies —
Winds that sink in songless death —
Are the light within man's eyes
And his body's breath.

For a little while he burns
Fitfully, a windy spark,
Ere his shrivelled soul returns
To the windy dark.



CASUALTIES



TO MICHAEL

If the promise of your coming's true,
And you should live through years of peace,
O son of mine, forget not these,
The sons of man, who died for you.

ANGUS ARMSTRONG

Ghostly through the drifting mist the lingering snow-
wreaths glimmer,
And ghostly comes the lych-owl's hunting cry,
And ghostly with wet fleeces in the watery moon
ashimmer,
One by one the grey sheep slowly pass me by.

One by one through bent and heather, disappearing
in the hollow,
Ghostly shadows down the grassy track they steal:
And I dread to see them passing, lest a ghost be-
hind them follow —
A ghost from Flanders follow, dog at heel.

ALAN GORDON

Roses he loved and their outlandish names —
Gloire de Dijon, Léonie Lamesch,
Chateau du Clos Vougeot — like living flames
They kindled in his memory afresh
As, lying in the mud of France, he turned
His eyes to the grey sky, light after light:
And last within his dying memory burned
Chateau du Clos Vougeot's deep crimson night.

JACK ALLEN

“I’m mighty fond of blackberry-jam,” he said:
“It tastes of Summer. When I come again,
You’ll give me some for tea, and soda-bread?”

Black clusters throng each bramble-spray burned red,
And over-ripe, are rotting in the rain:
But not for him is any table spread
Who comes not home again.

MARTIN AKENSHAW

Heavy the scent of elder in the air
As on the night he went : the starry bloom
He'd brushed in passing dusted face and hair,
And the hot fragrance filled the little room.

Heavy the scent of elder : in the night
Where I lie lone abed with stifling breath
And eyes that dread to see the morning light,
The heavy fume of elder smells of death.

RALPH STRAKER

Softly out of the dove-grey sky
Drift the snow-flakes fine and dry
Till braeside and bottom are all heaped high.

Remembering how he would love to go
Over the crisp and the creaking snow,
I wonder that now he can lie below

If softly out of the Flanders sky
Drift the snowflakes fine and dry
Till crater and shell-hole are all heaped high.

DONALD FRASER

He polished granite tombstones all his life
To earn a living for his bairns and wife
Till he was taken for the war, and he
Went his first voyage over the salt sea.

Now somewhere underneath the Flemish skies
Sunk in unsounded flats of mud he lies
In a vast moundless grave, unnamed, unknown,
Nor marked at head or foot by stock or stone.

PETER PROUDFOOT

He cleaned out middens for his daily bread :
War took him overseas and on a bed
Of lilies-of-the-valley dropt him, dead.

JOE BARNES

To a proud peacock strutting tail in air
He clipped the yew each thirteenth of July:
No feather ruffled, sleek and debonair,
Clean-edged it cut the yellow evening sky.

But he returns no more, who went across
The narrow seas one thirteenth of July:
And drearily all day the branches toss,
Ragged and dark against the rainy sky.

DICK MILBURN

He stood against the trunk to light his pipe,
And, glancing at the green boughs overhead,
“ We’ll pinch those almonds when they’re ripe,” he
said.

But now the almond-shells are brown and ripe
Somewhere in No-man’s-land he’s lying dead;
And other lads are pinching them instead.

I’ve half-a-mind to save him one or two
In case his ghost comes back to claim a few
And do the other things he meant to do.

PHILIP DAGG

It pricked like needles slashed into his face,
The unceasing, rustling smother of dry snow
That stormed the ridge on that hell-raking blast:

And then he knew the end had come at last,
And stumbled blindly, muttering "Cheerio!"
Into eternity and left no trace.

JOHN ELSDON

Stripped mother-naked save for a gold ring,
Where all day long the gaping doctors sit
Decreeing life or death, he proudly passed
In his young manhood: and they found him fit.

Of all that lustiness of flesh and blood
The crash of death has not left anything:
But, tumbled somewhere in the Flanders mire,
Unbroken lies the golden wedding ring.

NOEL DARK

She sleeps in bronze, the Helen of his dream,
Within the quiet of my little room,
Touched by a kindling birch-log's flickering gleam
To tenderer beauty in the rosy gloom.

She sleeps in bronze: and he who fashioned her,
Shaping the wet clay with such eager joy,
Slumbers as soundly where the cold winds stir
The withered tussocks on the plains of Troy.

MARK ANDERSON

On the low table by the bed
Where it was set aside last night,
Beyond the bandaged lifeless head,
It glitters in the morning-light :

And as the hours of watching pass,
I cannot sleep, I cannot think,
But only gaze upon the glass
Of water that he could not drink.

IN KHAKE



THE KITTIWAKE

With blistered heels and bones that ache,
Marching through pitchy ways and blind,
The mirey track is hard to make:
Yet, ever hovering in my mind,
Above red crags a kittiwake
Hangs motionless against the wind —

Grey-winged, white-breasted and black-eyed,
Above red crags of porphyry
That pillar from a sapphire tide
A sapphire sky . . . Indifferently
The raw lad limping at my side
Blasphemes his boots the world and me . . .

Still keen, unwavering and alert
Within my aching empty mind
The bright bird hovers, and the dirt
Of bottomless black ways and blind,
And all the hundred things that hurt
Past healing seem to drop behind.

MEDICAL OFFICERS' CLERK

Let me forget these sordid histories
These callous records of obscene disease,
This world of scabies and of syphilis
Wherein I drudge until my whole mind is
Besotted by the sodden atmosphere . . .

Let me remember Venus dawning clear
Through beryl seas of air, a crystal flame —
Glistening as from the cold salt wave she came —
Over the far and ghostly hills of Wales
Dwindling in darkness as the twilight fails . . .

Let me recall the singing and the shine
Of the clear amber waters of the Tyne,
Pouring from peaty uplands of black moss
Over grey boulders, while the salmon toss
Wet, curving silver bodies in the air,
Scrambling in shoals to scale the salmon-stair
Over the roaring weir . . .

Let me again
League after league of level stainless snow
Stretching unbroken under the low sky

NEIGHBOURS

In that huge clanking and eternal train
Over the prairies of Dakota go —
World without end to all eternity —
Until desire and dream and all delight
Drowse to oblivion in a timeless white
Unundulating wilderness . . .

Or let me sail

Again up the blue Bosphorus within hail
Of many-fountained gardens of the rose
Where bloom on bloom the Summer burns and
glows,
By minarets that soar like lily-blooms
About the shimmering white mushroom domes
Of marble mosques in groves of cypresses . . .

Till I remember no more histories
Of horror, or in drudgery and fret
Of endless days no longer quite forget
The stars and singing waters and the snow,
And how the roses of Arabia blow.

THE CHART

Drawing red lines on a chart
With diligent ruler and pen,
Keeping a record of men,
Numbers and names in black ink —
Numbers and names that were men . . .

With diligent ruler and pen
Drawing red lines on a chart —
Would you not break, O my heart,
If I stopped but a moment to think!

THE CONSCRIPT

Indifferent, flippant, earnest, but all bored,
The doctors sit in the glare of electric light
Watching the endless stream of naked white
Bodies of men for whom their hasty award
Means life or death maybe or the living death
Of mangled limbs, blind eyes or a darkened brain:
And the chairman as his monocle falls again
Pronounces each doom with easy indifferent breath.

Then suddenly I shudder as I see
A young man move before them wearily,
Cadaverous as one already dead:
But still they stare untroubled as he stands
With arms outstretched and drooping thorn-crowned
head,
The nail-marks glowing in his feet and hands.

SUSPENSE

As gaudy flies across a pewter plate
On the grey disk of the unrippling sea,
Beneath an airless sullen sky of slate,
Dazzled destroyers zig-zag restlessly:
While underneath the sleek and livid tide,
Blind monsters nosing through the soundless deep,
Lean submarines among blind fishes glide
And through primeval weedy forests sweep.

Over the hot grey surface of my mind
Glib motley rumours zig-zag without rest;
While deep within the darkness of my breast
Monstrous desires, lean sinister and blind,
Slink through unsounded night and stir the slime
And ooze of oceans of forgotten time.

AIR-RAID

Night shatters in mid-heaven: the bark of guns,
The roar of planes, the crash of bombs, and all
The unshackled skiey pandemonium stuns
The senses to indifference, when a fall
Of masonry nearby startles awake,
Tingling wide-eyed, prick-eared, with bristling hair,
Each sense within the body, crouched aware
Like some sore-hunted creature in the brake.

Yet side by side we lie in the little room
Just touching hands, with eyes and ears that strain
Keenly, yet dream-bewildered through tense gloom,
Listening, in helpless stupor of insane
Drugged nightmare panic fantastically wild,
To the quiet breathing of our sleeping child.

RAGTIME

A minx in khaki struts the limelit boards:
With false moustache, set smirk and ogling eyes
And straddling legs and swinging hips she tries
To swagger it like a soldier, while the chords
Of rampant ragtime jangle, clash and clatter,
And over the brassy blare and drumming din
She strains to squirt her squeaky notes and thin
Spirtle of sniggering lascivious patter.

Then out into the jostling Strand I turn,
And down a dark lane to the quiet river,
One stream of silver under the full moon,
And think of how cold searchlights flare and burn
Over dank trenches where men crouch and shiver,
Humming, to keep their hearts up, that same tune.

LEAVE

Crouched on the crowded deck, we watch the sun
In naked gold leap out of the cold sea
Of shivering silver; and stretching drowsily
Crampt arms and legs, relieved that night is done
And the slinking, deep-sea peril passed, we turn
Westward to see the chilly, sparkling light
Quicken the Wicklow Hills, till jewel-bright
In their Spring freshness of dewy green they burn.

And silent on the deck beside me stands
A comrade, lean and brown, with restless hands
And eyes that stare unkindling on the life
And rapture of green hills and glistening morn:
He comes from Flanders home to his dead wife,
And I, from England, to my son newborn.

BACCHANAL

(November 1918)

Into the twilight of Trafalgar Square
They pour from every quarter, banging drums
And tootling penny trumpets: to a blare
Of tin mouth-organs, while a sailor strums
A solitary banjo, lads and girls
Locked in embraces, in a wild dishevel
Of flags and streaming hair, with curdling skirls
Surge in a frenzied reeling panic revel.

Lads who so long have stared death in the face,
Girls who so long have tended death's machines,
Released from the numb terror shriek and prance:
And watching them, I see the outrageous dance,
The frantic torches and the tambourines
Tumultuous on the midnight hills of Thrace.

CAMOUFLAGE

Out of the puddle of his mind there poured
A sickly trickle of obscenities
Till some chance word of mine waked into life
Within his heart half-frozen memories :

And then with shining eyes he talked of home,
His wife and their one bairn, a little lass,
And all her darling ways : but suddenly
I saw the radiance from his blue eyes pass

As, slouching up to us, another chum
Cursed the lance-jack with casual blasphemies :
And once again from that slack mouth poured out
A sickly trickle of obscenities.

THE OLEOGRAPH

After the bomb, there stood one parlour-wall,
Papered with roses, still defying fate,
And smiling in its gold frame over all
A portrait of King Edward, hanging straight,
The glass unbroken and the gilt unsmashed,
Still blandly beaming, if a trifle bored,
As it had blandly beamed when darkness crashed
On him who hung it by its crimson cord.

BAGGAGE

Three girls who still have something of the grace
Of fleeting girlishness in form and face,
Tricked out in all their fripperies, await
The first three comers through the barrack-gate.

They await the first three comers, any three,
Smart, sullen, loutish, swaggering or brave —
Soldiers, who'll soon forget them for the grave —
Lovers, whom they'll forget as easily
As they've forgotten last year's finery.

LONG TOM

He talked of Delhi brothels half the night,
Quaking with fever; and then dragging tight
The frowsy blankets to his chattering chin
Cursed for an hour because they were so thin,
And nothing would keep out that gnawing cold —
Scarce forty years of age, and yet so old,
Haggard and worn, with burning eyes set deep —
Until at last he cursed himself asleep.

Before I'd shut my eyes reveille came;
And as I dressed by the one candle-flame,
The mellow golden light fell on his face
Still sleeping, touching it to tender grace,
Rounding the features life had scarred so deep,
Till youth came back to him in quiet sleep:
And then what women saw in him I knew,
And why they'd love him all his brief life through.

SENTRY GO

True lad who shared the guard with me
That night of whirling snow,
What other nights have brought to you
I may not know.

Although I never heard your name
And hardly saw your face;
You poured out all your heart to me
As we kept pace.

I don't know if you're living still,
Or fallen in the fight:
But in my heart your heart is safe
Till the last night.

REVEILLE

Still bathed in its moonlight slumber, the little white
house by the cedar
Stands silent against the red dawn;
And nothing I know of who sleeps there, to the
travail of day yet unwakened,
Behind the blue curtains undrawn:

But I dream as we march down the roadway, ringing
loud and rime-white in the moonlight,
Of a little dark house on a hill
Wherein when the battle is over, to the rapture of
day yet unwakened,
We shall slumber as soundless and still.

TRAVELS



AULLA

Bronzed hills of oak that sweep
Up to Carrara's peaks of snow
Against a blue November sky,
Burnished with evening sunshine, glow
And bask in drowsy sleep —
When piercingly a cry
Rings from the little town below,
And startled echoes leap
From steep to steep.

What soul in agony
Cried out at sunset long ago
I'll never know :
But in my memory perpetually
Bronze hills and silver peaks and steely sky
Reverberate with that despairing cry.

THE CAKEWALK

In smoky lamplight of a Smyrna café
He sees them, seven solemn negroes dancing
With faces rapt and out-thrust bellies prancing
In a slow solemn ceremonial cakewalk,
Dancing and prancing to the sombre tom-tom
Thumped by a crookbacked grizzled negro squat-
ting :

And as he watches . . . in the steamy twilight
Of swampy forest in rank greenness rotting
That sombre tom-tom at his heartstrings strumming
Sets all his sinews twitching and a singing
Of cold fire through his blood — and he is dancing
Among his fellows in the dank green twilight
With naked oiled bronze-gleaming bodies swinging
In a rapt holy everlasting cakewalk
For evermore in slow procession prancing.

THESSALY

Sun-steeped translucent marble, and beyond,
Pale marble hills of amethyst and rose
Above the shadowy olive-grove that shows
A sea-green shimmer like a tide-left pond
Of brackish waters under the pale blue sky
Of the unclouded noon of Thessaly :
And over that pallid sky and pallid sea
Obviously the sultry hours drift by —
Drift by in sun-steeped and translucent dream,
Till suddenly a seagull's strident scream
Stabs through my sense, and once again I ride
In a little coble the dark tossing tide
Of glancing, shivering Northern seas, a boy
Chanting to that dark sky the tale of Troy.

SMYRNA

Over the mountain's shadowed snow
A rosy flake, the moon
Drifts in the beryl glow
Of early night :
And over the still sea
Of malachite
Sings from the marble quay,
Where blue-black Nubians crouch in shivering cold,
A shrill and reedy tune
My heart first heard
In Uganda forests piped by some dead bird
In unremembered days of old.

CHALLENGE

Why does the seamew scream
When I would lie at rest,
Floating in dreamless dream
On the dark sea's breast,
Floating forgetfully
On the unremembering sea
Of eternity?

Sick of the senseless fret
Of blind and bitter strife,
Fain would my heart forget
The challenge of life:
But foamheads ruffle and gleam,
And tumult shatters my dream
At the seamew's scream.

ON BROADWAY

Daffodils dancing by moonlight in English meadows,
Moon-pale daffodils under the April moon —
Here in the throng and clangour and hustle of
 Broadway,
Broadway brawling and loud in the glare of the
 noon,
Comes to me now as a half-remembered tune
The silence and wonder of daffodils dancing by
 moonlight,
Dreamily dancing in dew-sprinkled moonshiny
 meadows,
Ghostly daffodils under a ghostly moon.

IN FIFTH AVENUE

A negro in a dandy livery
Of blue and silver, dangling from one hand
A rose-emblazoned bandbox jauntily —
With conscious smile of gold and ivory
He ambles down the sidewalk . . .

And I see

Him naked, in a steamy forest-land
Of dense green swamp, beneath a dripping tree,
Crouched for the spring, and grinning greedily.

ON STATEN ISLAND, 1917

Out of the bosky glen into the still Summer night
Fluttering, twinkling, sparkling, light upon fairy
light

The fireflies glance and dance in an endless flickering
flight.

And over the still grey Hudson, stabbing the silvery
haze

The flaring festal lights of Coney Island blaze
Where men and women dance in a razzling-dazzling
daze . . .

And sitting in silence under the dark unrustling trees
We think of the lads who crouch in trenches over-
seas

With eyes that stare all night on other lights than
these.

THE LOST RING

Thridding the little tangled wood that crested
With silver-birch the silvery wave-like dune,
A slashing twig from off my finger wrested
The golden ring just as the wintry moon
Plunged in black cloud, and from my clutching hand
It tumbled noiseless in the shadowy sand.

All night in vain with fearful eager fingers
I raked among the sand and rustling leaves :
Dawn came, noon passed : and now the last light
 lingers
Along the lake, and still my cold heart grieves
Love's token lost, as through my naked hand
Life seems to trickle coldly as dead sand.

IN INDIANA

Snow on the hills and stars in a crystal sky . . .
Around me the golden leagues of the prairie lie
Under the blaze of July :

And my heart turns home to the hills in their win-
try white
As I saw them last on that December night
Lustrous in cold starlight —

To the hills of my heart that are far over land and
sea
And the snug little house on the Beacon where I
would be,
That is all-in-all to me.

So under the glare of July
While around me the aching leagues of the prairie
lie,
I long for the snow on the hills and the stars in a
crystal sky.

BY LAKE MICHIGAN

As out of intricate wintry woods to-night
Through white dunes suddenly on the starlit lake
I came, and saw the windy waters break,
Frothing along the sand, beneath the light
Of far steel furnaces whose ruddy flare
Was mingled with the glitter of stars, once more
Among the ghostly dunes of that strange shore
I knew the desolation of despair.

Though I by day and night unceasingly
Hunger for you and for the hills of home:
Yet that heart-breaking beauty of starry foam
And rosy fire to livelier agony
Shivered my courage — till in dreams you came
And filled my heart with stars and rosy flame.

WINDOWS

I

The hills of Wales burned only dimmer gold
Beneath gold skies as over the green shires
I looked from my high window on the fires
Of sunset kindling; but they could not hold
My vagrant thought that in an instant leapt
To a window overseas that from a height
Looks down an alley where a girl one night
Was done to death while, knowing naught, I slept.

And brooding in my chair I wonder why
The golden uplands and the glistening sky
Should bring that horror of the dark to mind,
And in my consciousness I seek to trace
The ray that glimmers through dark ways and blind
Between the sunset and a dead girl's face.

WINDOWS

II

If I could live within the ray of light
That runs through all things everlastingly —
Not only glimpse in moments of clear sight
The glancing of the golden shuttles that ply
'Twixt things diverse in seeming, stars and mud,
Innocence and the deed in darkness done,
The victim and the spiller of the blood —
The light that weaves the universe in one,
Then might my heart have ease and rest content
On the golden upland under the clear sky :
But ever must my restless days be spent
Following the fugitive gleam until I die —
Light-shotten darkness, glory struck from strife,
Terror to beauty kindling, death, to life.

TRAVELS

Atlantic and Pacific I have sailed,
And sojourned in old cities of Cathay,
Icy Himalayas and stark Alps I've scaled,
And up great golden rivers thrust my way
Through crass, green, acrid, ominous dripping night
Of Senegambia : over the still snows
Of polar lands flushed with unfading rose
Of the rayless sun's cold clipped unkindling light,
Through the great Canyon's twilight mystery,
And over Arizona's sand and stone
I travel the round world unceasingly,
Unresting, uncompanioned and apart :
Yet never may I pierce the dark unknown
And undiscovered country of my own heart.

HOME



WINGS

As a blue-necked mallard alighting in a pool
Among marsh-marigolds and splashing wet
Green leaves and yellow blooms, like jewels set
In bright black mud, with clear drops crystal-cool,
Bringing keen savours of the sea and stir
Of windy spaces where wild sunsets flame
To that dark inland dyke, the thought of her
Into my brooding stagnant being came.

And all my senses quickened into life,
Tingling and glittering, and the salt and fire
Sang through my singing blood in eager strife
Until through crystal airs we seemed to be
Soaring together, one fleet-winged desire
Of windy sunsets and the wandering sea.

DREAM-COME-TRUE

Dearest, while it would sometimes seem
As if I really had the art
Of putting into words the dream
That fills another's heart —

And though in its own dream-come-true
My heart sings ever like a bird's
The wonder of my life with you
I cannot put in words.

ONE-DAY-OLD

Baby asleep on my arm
Would that my heart could enfold you,
Cherish you, shelter you, hold you
Ever from harm.

Born in a season of strife
When warring with fire and with thunder
Men wantonly shatter asunder
All that was life —

Into a world full of death
You come with a gift for the living
Of quiet grey eyes and a giving
Of innocent breath.

Baby asleep on my arm
Would that my heart could enfold you,
Cherish you, shelter you, hold you
Ever from harm.

TO AUDREY

A crocus brimmed with morning light
Burning clean and amber-clear,
Single on the wet black mould —

So to me you come, who hold
Heaven in your heart, my dear,
Every morning out of night.

MICHAEL

Why should he wake up chuckling? Only hark!
Chuckle on chuckle, lying in the dark
Alone in his little cot. What may there be
That we, for all our wisdom, cannot see
Gazing grave-eyed, in the old heart of night
To fill his baby heart with such delight?

SUNSETS

When the world fell to pieces, and we stood
Stripped to disaster, in the surge and reel
Of crashing nations, still too numbed to feel,
Too stunned to think, we knew one thing held good
Above the strife, and though all else should fail
That made life lovely underneath the sun,
Love, that from the beginning made us one,
Against annihilation should prevail.

And when on the shivering edge of the unknown
Unfathomed darkness each must stand alone
With eyes that look their last upon the light
Regretful and bewildered, we'll not shrink.
But, still undoubting, over the last brink
Step down unfalteringly into the night.

THE STAIR

Dear, when you climbed the icy Matterhorn,
Or braved the crouching green-eyed jungle-night —
With heart exultant in the sheer white light
Of the snow peak, or cowering forlorn
In the old Indian darkness terror-torn —
Had you no inkling on that crystal height
Or in that shuddering gloom, how on a flight
Of London stairs we'd meet one Winter's morn?

And when we met, dear, did you realise
That as I waited, watching you descend,
Glad in the sunshine of your eyes and hair,
And you the first time looked into my eyes
Your wanderings were done, and on that stair
I, too, O love, had reached the journey's end.

THE EMPTY COTTAGE

Over the meadows of June
The plovers are crying
All night under the moon
That silvers with ghostly light
The thatch of the little old cottage, so lonely to-night.

Lonely and empty it stands
By the sign-post that stretches white hands
Pointing to far-away lands
Where alone and apart we are lying.

Lonely and empty of all delight
It stands in the blind white night:
And under the thatch there is no one to hark to the
crying,
To the restless voices of plovers, flying and crying
Over the meadows of June,
All night under the moon
Crying . . .

THE CLIFFS

In the warm dusk of the moonless Summer night,
As on the shingle by the still, dark sea
We rest, the chalk-cliffs beetle eerily
Over us glimmering a ghostly white;
And silence steals upon us as we lie
Watching a far-off intermittent light
Momently flashing cold and dazzling bright
Between the dark tide and the moonless sky.

We watch the flashing light that seems to flare
An instant only between centuries
Of ominous grey midnight, and we stare
With eager peering eyes into the gloom,
While over our little lives in shadow loom
Primeval cold still ghostly presences.

HOUSES

The house we built with hands
To shelter love's delight
From the pitchy night,
Dark and empty stands.

But from our house of dreams
Everlasting light
Through the pitchy night
Pours in golden streams.

WORCESTER BEACON

When every spur of whin's a spike of ice,
Each grassy tussock bristling blades of steel,
Each withered bracken-frond a rare device
Of sparkling crystal crackling under heel
With brittle tinkling, then it is the time,
O love, to leave the chilly hearth and climb
The sun-lit Beacon, where the live airs blow
Along the clean wave-edge of drifted snow.

Love, let us go
And scale the ridge: I long to see you there
Breathing the eager air
With cheeks aglow,
The sunlight on your hair:
O love, I long to share
With you a moment the white ecstasy
And crystal silence of eternity.

WORDS

Could I without weak words that fret and grieve
Fashion of singing airs and living light
The invisible fabric that the swallows weave
At sunset in their interlacing flight,
A sheer imperishable ecstasy
To clothe your spirit in viewless singing fire,
Then should I labour to my heart's desire,
Nor fear to dim your spirit's lucency.

But I have only words, words born in stress
And travail, for your spirit's loveliness.
Yet may not my dark syllables in their flight
Through other minds weave out of song and light
The fabric of my dream, that all men see
Your spirit's beauty through eternity.

THE SADDLE

The Saddle,— where that August noon we basked
Above the gorse in the quivering golden glow,—
Was a smother of white mist and driving snow
That stinging, blinding and bewildering, tasked
My utmost powers as in the wan twilight
I crossed the ridge this afternoon alone,
Plunging thigh-deep through drifts of whirling
white
In a wind that seemed to strip me to the bone.

Yet as I struggled through the drifts I knew
No sharp regret for golden days gone by;
For in my heart was the blaze and scent and bloom
Of unforgotten summers, as I thought of you
And the happy babes even then awaiting me
In the golden hearthlight of our little room.

SONG

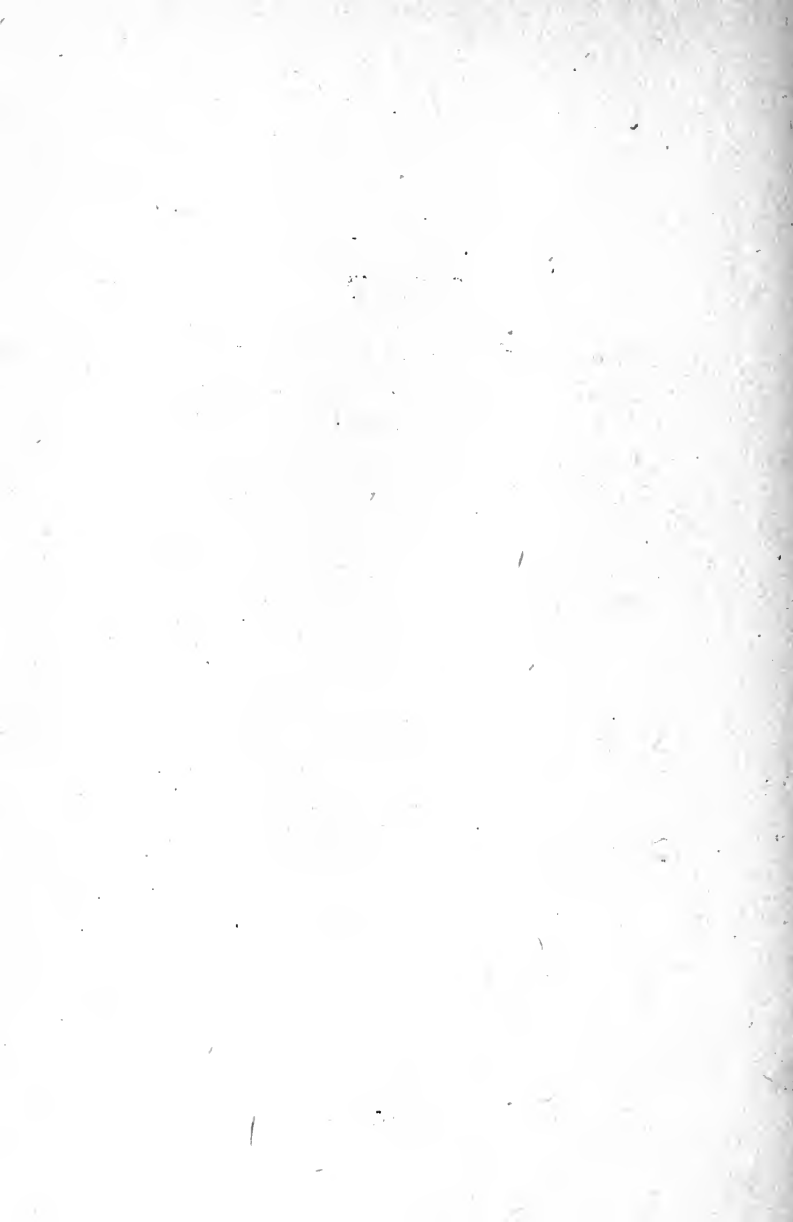
I long to shape in stone
What life has meant to me
That my delight be known
To all eternity.

Though in love's praise I give
To time frail words alone,
Yet may not song outlive
All perishable stone.

QUIET

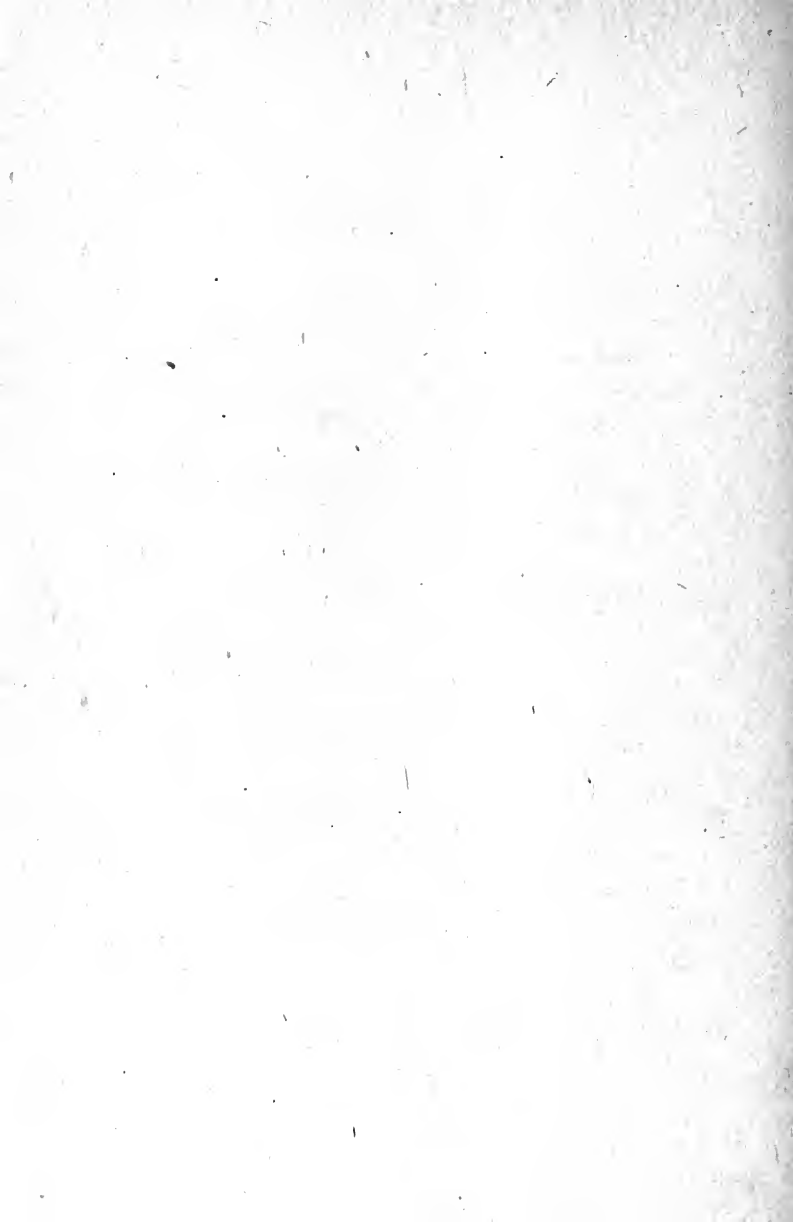
Only the footprints of the partridge run
Over the billowy drifts on the mountain-side;
And now on level wings the brown birds glide,
Following the snowy curves, and in the sun
Bright birds of gold above the stainless white
They move, and as the pale blue shadows move,
With them my heart glides on in golden flight
Over the hills of quiet to my love.

Storm-shaken, racked with terror through the long
Tempestuous night, in the quiet blue of morn
Love drinks the crystal airs, and peace newborn
Within his troubled heart, on wings aglow
Soars into rapture, as from the quiet snow
The golden birds; and out of silence, song.



SALVAGE

Five of these poems have been rescued from a discarded book, issued in 1905: the sixth, "The Salt-Marshes," though written in 1912, is now printed for the first time.



THE LAMBING

Softly she slept in the night — her newborn bairn at
her breast,

A wee warm crinkled hand to the dimpling bosom
pressed —

As I rose from her side to go, though sore was my
heart to stay,

To the ease of the labouring ewes that else might die
before day.

Banking the peats on the hearth, I reached from the
rafter-hook

My lanthorn, and kindled the wick; and taking my
plaid and crook,

I lifted the latch and turned once more to see if she
slept,

And looked on the slumber of peace: then into the
night I stepped

Into the swirling dark of the driving, blinding sleet,
And a world that seemed to sway and slip from un-
der my feet

As if rocked in the wind that swept the roaring star-
less night

NEIGHBOURS

Yet fumed and fashed in vain at my lanthorn's
shielded light.

Clean-drenched in the first wild gust, I battled across
the garth

And passed through the clashing gate — the warm
peat-glow of the hearth

And the quiet of love in my breast, the craven voices
to quell

As I set my teeth to the wind, and turned to the open
fell.

Over the tussocky bent I strove till I reached the
fold —

My brow like ice and my hands so numbed they
scarcely could hold

My crook or unloosen the pen: but I heard a lamb's
weak cries

As the gleam of my lanthorn lit the night of its new-
born eyes.

Toiling and trembling I watched each young life
struggle for breath,

Fighting till dawn for my flock with the oldest of
herdsmen, death:

And glad was my heart when at last the stackyard
again I crossed,

And thought of the labour well over with never a
yeacling lost.

NEIGHBOURS

But as I came to the door of my home, drawing
 wearily nigh,
I heard with a boding heart a feeble whickering cry
Like a motherless yeanning's bleat : and I stood in the
 dawn's chill light
Afraid of I knew not what, sore spent with the toil
 of the night.

Then setting a quaking hand to the latch I opened
 the door,
And shaking the cold from my heart I stumbled
 across the floor
To the bed where she lay so quiet, calm-bosomed, in
 dreamless rest
And the wailing baby clutched in vain at the lifeless
 breast.

I looked on the still white face, then sank with a cry
 by the bed
And knew that the hand of death had stricken my
 whole joy dead —
My flock, my world and my heart with my love at a
 single blow :
And I cried " I, too, must die ! " and it seemed that
 life ebbed low,

NEIGHBOURS

And the shadow of death drew nigh : when I felt the
touch on my cheek
Of a little warm hand out-thrust, and I heard that
wail so weak :
And knowing that not for me yet was there ease
from love or strife,
I caught the bairn to my breast and looked in the
eyes of life.

THE FIRE

Brushwood and broom I bring to feed my fire,
Brief-flaming bracken, brittle-flaring ling,
Quick-crackling gorse and cones that smouldering
sing

With sappy hiss as blue flames jet and spire,
Beech-mast and leaves through long years bedded
deep,

Pine-needles stacked about rock-rooted firs
In woodland hollows where no echo stirs —
I bring to feed the fire that shall not sleep.
Fiercely it leaps, exultant in the night
In fresh-fed fury roaring to the stars,
While gaunt black shadows dance among the scars
Whose craggy spurs are tipped with golden light.
By night and day the perishing bright flame
Wind-flourished flares and fails, yet never dies,
But lives that I therein may watch your eyes —
Those fire-bright eyes my love could never tame
Which from the white heat of the burning core
Look out upon me as I gaze and gaze.

I bring fresh boughs to feed the hungry blaze
That fire may burn your heart for evermore
Wherever in far southern lands you roam,

NEIGHBOURS

By what marshlight of wandering passion led :
For tumbled, cold and empty lies my bed,
Deserted bare and windswept is my home.
Without foreboding from the fold I turned
To come to you ; but over the heather-thatch
No smoke of welcome curled : I raised the latch
No fire of welcome on the hearthstone burned.
I called your name : I climbed the ladder-stair
Up to the roof-tree chamber, raftered low :
The sunset filled it with a golden glow
Of mocking light, but you I found not there.
Long, long I called your name in bield and byre
And fold and shieling, over hill and dale.
Your heart heard not. With hands that never fail
I feed and feed the never-failing fire.
Wide-eyed, not ever slumbering, night or day,
I watch the flame that feeds upon my life,
That trampling shower or thunder's crashing strife
Shall never quench till all be burned away —
Till when, at last, consumed and spent I fall
In cold grey ash of passion's fiery gold,
Wherever you be, your heart shall shudder cold,
Your feet shall turn to answer to my call.

THE HAYMAKERS

Last night as in my bed awake
I fretted for the day
I heard the land rail's constant crake
Among the unmown hay :

And in my head the thought that burned
And parched my lips and throat
Was like a wheel of fire that turned
On that hot aching note.

But with the crowing of the cock
The hours of waiting passed,
And slowly a shrill-chiming clock
Struck out the night at last.

I rose ; and soon my hot eyes roved
Over meadows dewy-deep
That in the wind of morning moved
As if they turned from sleep :

And where the crimson-rambler wreathed
The casement of my room

NEIGHBOURS

On my hot brow the cool air breathed
As on each fading bloom.

I watched the martin wheel and poise
Above his nested mate :
When clear through morning's murmurous noise
I heard a clicking gate

As down the dipping meadow-road
He bore with easy pace
His shouldered scythe, and brightly glowed
The dawn-light on his face.

All morn with singing chorus blithe
Unwearied through cool hours
Was heard the swishing of the scythe
Among the grass and flowers.

All morn behind the swaying row
Of shoulders brown and bare
I followed, glad at heart to know
He moved before me there.

And as I laboured with the rake
Among the stricken grass,
Light-footed in the mowers' wake
The happy hours did pass.

NEIGHBOURS

Too quick they went, and all too soon
The hour of resting came
When over the withering field the noon
Hung in a still blue flame,

For as in shadow green and cool
He sank down wearily
Beside an alder-shaded pool
He never turned to me ;

And though afar beneath the briar
I watched him where he lay,
He knew not that my eyes afire
Burned brighter than the day :

And yet so loudly in my breast
Beat my tormented heart
As if to rouse him from his rest
I thought to see him start

As one awaked from midnight sleep
By knocking in the dark.
But in his eyes unclouded deep
There gleamed no kindling spark.

.

To-night no rails unresting crake
'Mid fallen grass and flowers :

NEIGHBOURS

Naught stirs, and yet I lie awake
And count the crawling hours :

And as I watch the glimmering light
I await dawn tremblingly,
Lest in the quiet of the night
His heart has turned to me —

Lest I should find the day has come,
As yet the day shall rise
When he shall stand before me dumb,
The fire within his eyes.

ROMAN'S LEAP

They found you nigh the foot of Roman's Leap
Deep-buried in the bracken's rustling gold —
Your arm beneath you bent, your brown face cold,
Yet all unheeding round you browsed your sheep.

They found you nigh the foot of Roman's Leap:
They laid you on a hurdle, bracken-strewn:
They bore you home beneath the waning moon
With laboured breathing up the craggy steep.

They found you nigh the foot of Roman's Leap:
Their whispering shadows darkened in the door:
Their griding hobnails crossed the sanded floor,
And in with them the whole night seemed to sweep.

They found you nigh the foot of Roman's Leap:
They laid you out upon the fourpost bed,
Two candles at your feet, two at your head,
Salt on your breast your soul from harm to keep.

They found you nigh the foot of Roman's Leap:
Deep buried in the bracken's rustling gold:
Dumb sorrow in my heart is frozen cold:
Unloose your clutch, O death, that I may weep!

THE ARROW

By peat-black waters flecked with foam
She lay beneath the flaming West.
I plucked the arrow from her breast,
And staunched the wound, and bore her home.

Before the hearth's red glowing peat
I laid her on a bracken-bed,
And loosed the dank hair round her head,
And chafed her snow-cold hands and feet

Until the living colour crept
Through her slim body : and her eyes
Looked into mine in still surprise
Once only ere she softly slept.

Yet, though she wakened not nor stirred,
I gazed in those still eyes all night

NEIGHBOURS

Within the peat-glow till the light
Of daybreak roused some restless bird :

When in the dawning's drowsy grey
With watching spent I fell asleep,
And slumbered till the bleat of sheep
Awakened me, and it was day.

Cold on my brow I felt the wind
That gently flapped the unlatched door,
And stirred the bracken on the floor
Whereon I looked and thought to find

Beauty yet slumbering in the gold
Of withered fern : but no dark head
Now nestled in the bracken-bed
That rustled in the dawn-wind cold :

And she was gone I knew not where :
I only knew that I must go
To seek her ever high and low
By hills and valleys of despair.

So, flinging wide the flapping door,
I turned my back upon my home.
By peat-black waters flecked with foam,
From dawn till dark, for evermore

NEIGHBOURS

By moss and fell I keep my quest
Grown old and frail with failing breath,
Though now I know that only death
May pluck the arrow from my breast.

THE SALTMARSHES

Over the fog-smothered marshes we splashed on our
way to the quay

Under a blind yellow moon bemused in a mizzle of
rain,

When low through the yelping of gulls and the muffled
wash-wash of the sea

Suddenly shuddered a voice — the voice of a creature
in pain.

Cold at my heart, I stopped dead on the causeway,
and listening hard,

I muttered, and half to myself, "It's surely a human
moaning!"

But still stumping steadily on, Pete grumbled, "It's
naught but the groaning —

The groaning and fash of a young cow calving in
Angerton's Yard."

Yet again, as we steered to the pots through the
breathless and mist-mothered night,

Coldly over my heart that shuddering, smothering
cry,

Low through the salty fret and the dazzle of drizzly
light

NEIGHBOURS

Echoing sobbed and moaned, then sank to a shivering sigh:

And under my breath as I stooped again to the oars,
rowing hard,

I muttered once more to myself: "It's surely a human moaning!"

And only the oars in the rowlocks creaked in answer: "It's naught but the groaning —

The groaning and fash of a young cow calving in Angerton's Yard."

Dead they found her next day, the mothering girl, in the dyke,

Strayed from the track in the fog and foundered,
sucked down in the gloam,

For lightness of heart and for laughter none ever has known her like:

Heavy and quiet she lay, grave-eyed, as they carried her home.

And the trudge of the bearers' feet, to my icy-cold heart, beating hard,

As it still muttered over and over: "It's surely a human moaning!"

Mocked with a splashing thud-thud, as in answer: "It's naught but the groaning —

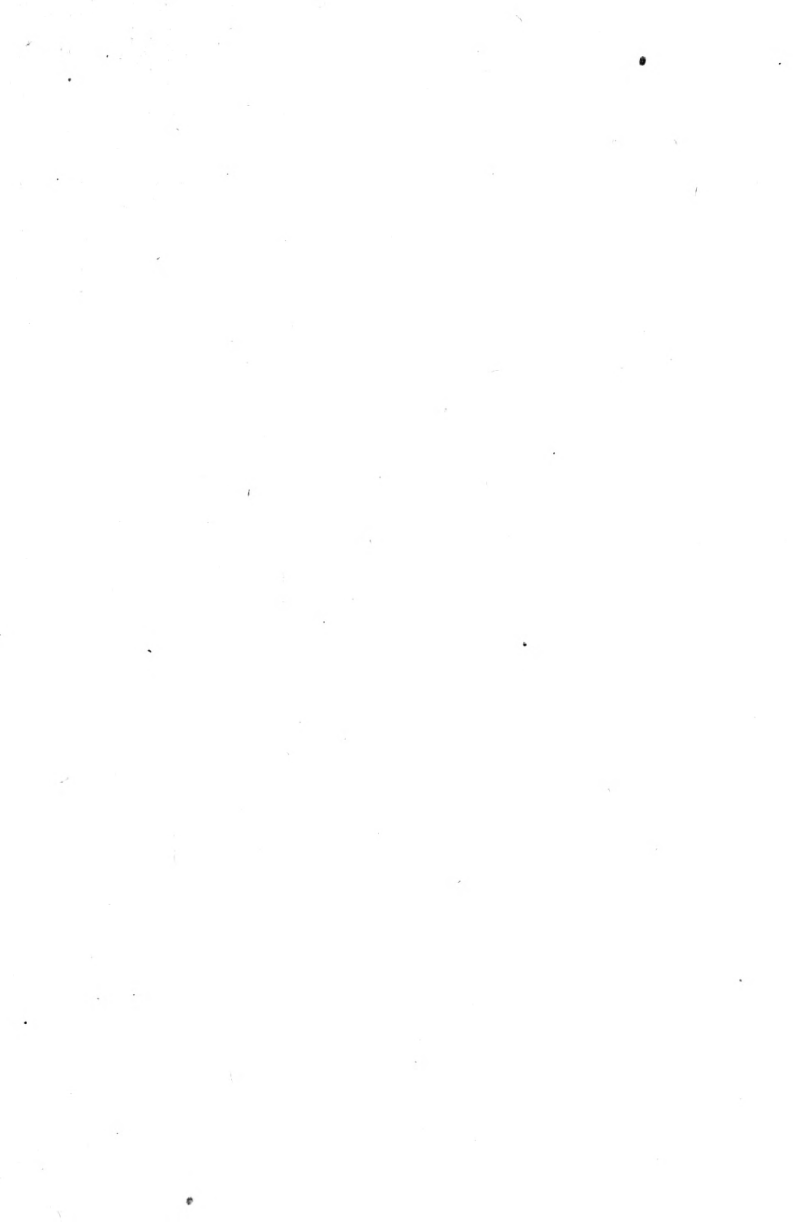
The groaning and fash of a young cow calving in Angerton's Yard."

NEIGHBOURS

And ever across the saltmarshes, making our way to
the quay
By moonlight or starlight or murk, in fog or fair
weather or rain,
Low through the yelping of gulls and the whisper or
crash of the sea,
Suddenly shudders a voice — the voice of a creature
in pain:
And vainly I cover my ears with my hands as my
heart listens hard,
Muttering and mumbling too late: “It’s surely a
human moaning!”
Bitterly mocking itself in answer: “It’s naught
but the groaning —
The groaning and fash of a young cow calving in
Angerton’s Yard.”

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